

CLAIMS

1. A data searching apparatus for searching a database based on a search criterion entered in a corresponding data-entry field by a user, the data searching apparatus comprising:
  - 5 a field information holding unit operable to hold field information indicating one or more of a plurality of data-entry fields that correspond one-to-one with a plurality of search categories structuring the database; and
  - 10 a field display unit operable to display the one or more data-entry fields indicated by the held field information, and to hide any of the plurality of data-entry fields not indicated by the held field information.
- 15 2. A data searching apparatus according to Claim 1, further comprising:
  - a category accepting unit operable to accept, from the user, a specification of one or more of the plurality of search categories; and
  - 20 an update unit operable to update the held field information, so as to indicate one or more data-entry fields corresponding to the one or more search categories.
- 25 3. A data searching apparatus according to Claim 2, wherein the field information holding unit is a nonvolatile recording medium, and
  - when the user performs a database search during a period

in which the updated field information is held without further update, the field display unit displays the one or more data-entry fields indicated by the updated field information, and hides any of the plurality of data-entry fields not indicated  
5 by the updated field information.

4. A data searching apparatus according to Claim 1, further comprising:

10 a category display unit operable to display a list of search categories;

a category accepting unit operable to accept, from the user, a selection of one or more search categories from the displayed list of search categories; and

15 an update unit operable to update the held field information based on the accepted selection, when the selection has been accepted.

5. A data searching apparatus according to Claim 4, wherein the field display unit updates the displayed data-entry  
20 fields immediately when the selection has been accepted.

6. A data searching apparatus according to Claim 1, further comprising:

25 a type display unit operable to display a list of types into which the plurality of search categories are classified;

a type accepting unit operable to accept, from the user, a selection of a desired type from the displayed list of types;

a category display unit operable to display a list of search categories that are classified as the selected type, when the selection of the type has been accepted;

5       a category accepting unit operable to accept, from the user, a selection of one or more search categories from the displayed list of search categories; and

an update unit operable to update the field information based on the accepted selection, when the selection of the search categories has been accepted.

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7.       A data searching apparatus according to Claim 6, wherein the field display unit updates the displayed data-entry fields immediately when the selection has been accepted.

15      8.       A data searching apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein the field information holding unit holds pieces of the field information each corresponding to a different user ID, the apparatus further comprises an ID accepting unit operable to accept a user ID inputted by the user before starting  
20      a database search, and

the field display unit displays the data-entry fields indicated by one of the pieces of the field information that corresponds to the accepted user ID.

25      9.       A data searching apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein the field information holding unit holds pieces of the field information each corresponding to a different search

purpose,

the apparatus further comprises a search purpose accepting unit operable to accept a search purpose selected by the user before starting a database search, and

5       the field display unit displays the data-entry fields indicated by one of the pieces of the field information that corresponds to the accepted search purpose.

10.      A data searching apparatus according to Claim 9, wherein

10       the apparatus is for searching a patent publication database,

each search purpose corresponds to each phase in patent related procedures, and

the search purpose accepting unit includes:

15       a search purpose display subunit operable to display a list of search purposes in an order of the corresponding phases in the patent related procedures; and

15       a search purpose accepting subunit operable to accept, from the user, a selection of a desired search purpose from 20      the displayed list of search purposes.

11.      A data searching apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein

the field information holding unit holds pieces of the field information each corresponding to a different search

25      purpose of a different user ID,

the apparatus further comprises an ID/purpose accepting unit operable to accept a user ID and a search purpose

respectively inputted and selected by the user before starting a database search, and

the field display unit displays the data-entry fields indicated by one of the pieces of the field information that 5 corresponds to the accepted user ID and search purpose.

12. A data searching apparatus according to Claim 9, wherein the apparatus is for searching a patent publication database,

10 each search purpose corresponds to each phase in patent related procedures, and

the ID/purpose accepting unit includes:

a search purpose display subunit operable to display a list of search purposes in an order of the corresponding phases 15 in the patent related procedures; and

a search purpose accepting subunit operable to accept, from the user, a selection of a desired search purpose from the displayed list of search purposes.

20 13. A data searching method for searching a database based on a search criterion entered in a corresponding data-entry field by a user, the data searching method comprising:

a field information holding step of holding field information indicating one or more of a plurality of data-entry 25 fields that correspond one-to-one with a plurality of search categories structuring the database; and

a field display step of displaying the one or more

data-entry fields indicated by the held field information, and hiding any of the plurality of data-entry fields not indicated by the held field information.

5    14. A data searching program for searching a database based on a search criterion entered in a corresponding data-entry field by a user, the data searching program comprising:

10      a field information holding step of holding field information indicating one or more of a plurality of data-entry fields that correspond one-to-one with a plurality of search categories structuring the database; and

15      a field display step of displaying the one or more data-entry fields indicated by the held field information, and hiding any of the plurality of data-entry fields not indicated by the held field information.